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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire to measure attitudes toward gifted programs was given to 113 teachers, 23 administrators, and 91 parents. Seven areas were investigated: definition, characteristics, identification, educational needs, funding priority, teacher characteristics, and current provisions. Among findings were the following: parents, as a group, were less informed and less critical of existing public school programs than were teacher and administrator groups: individuals with a college degree tended to respond in greater agreement with expert opinion than did their noncollege counterparts: the group which reported having had a gifted close friend was in closer agreement with literature on gifted student characteristics than the group of persons who did not report having had a gifted close friend: and respondents appeared to share an overall favorable impression of what the gifted student is likely to be. (SBH)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD PROGRAMS FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

Summary of Research

Given an increasingly strong federal commitment to gifted/talented education, it may be anticipated that public school administrators will soon be faced with the task of integrating gifted/talented programs into existing curricular structures. Such programs, if they are to afford maximum benefit to students, will require the combined support of educators' and parents' groups. The responsibility for reaching and motivating these groups will fall on public school officials at the local school district level. Anticipating these demands, this study proposed to develop a process and an instrument which, with situationally appropriate modifications, could be utilized by public school administrators to identify training and information deficits which might be addressed prior to program implementation.

The survey questionnaire developed in this study was composed of 7 item-clusters. Cluster I (Definition) was designed to determine the extent to which respondents agreed with the broad United States Office of Education definition of giftedness, which embraces intellectual, academic, creative, leadership, performing and/or psychomotor abilities. Cluster II (Characteristics) measured the extent to which respondents' perceptions of the characteristics of gifted students agreed with the portrait of the gifted child which emerges from literature of the field. Cluster III (Identification) examined respondents' opinions relative to the need for systematic identification programs and preferred methods to be employed in identification efforts. Cluster IV (Educational Needs) measured the extent of agreement between respondents and experts in the field relative to the particular educational needs of the gifted

student. Cluster V (Funding Priority) attempted to determine how strongly committed respondents were to funding of special programs for gifted/talented students. Cluster VI (Teacher Characteristics) was designed to determine the extent to which respondents agreed with the characteristics most noted in the literature as desirable among teachers of gifted students. Finally, Cluster VII (Current Provisions) assessed the respondents' satisfaction with current educational provisions for gifted students at local, state and federal levels.

The 75-item questionnaire was administered to a random sample of teachers, administrators and parents from a school district in West Texas. Of the 287 persons in the total sample, 232 (81 percent) returned the questionnaires. Included in the total return were 113 (92 percent) of the 123 teachers in the sample; 28 (68 percent) of the 41 administrators in the sample; and 91 (74 percent) of the 123 parents in the sample.

Analysis of variance techniques were employed in order to determine significant differences of opinion between and within groups. Differences between groups were measured in a series of 49 one-way analysis of variance tests which compared group responses on each of the 7 clusters. Of these, 19 tests revealed differences between groups which were significant at a .05 level of confidence.

In addition to between-group differences, this study was concerned with identifying significant interaction within groups. Toward this end, two-way analysis of variance tests were employed to measure the interaction effect of demographic variables with the variable of group membership. In a series of 42 two-way analysis of variance tests, group membership was treated as Main Effect A, while variables of age, education, income, ethnicity, and reported friendship or familial relationship with a gifted person were treated as Main Effect B. Only 3 of these tests revealed interaction effects which were significant at a .05 level of confidence.

Findings

Analysis of responses to the survey questionnaire revealed several interesting patterns. Perhaps the most obvious pattern is that of recurring differences of opinion between teacher, administrator and parent groups, with statistically significant differences occurring in 5 of the 7 clusters. On questions concerning the definition of giftedness, identification procedures, educational needs, teacher characteristics and current provisions for gifted students, the groups were clearly divided. Moreover, a distinct pattern of educators (teachers and administrators) versus parents was evident throughout. In every instance, the opinions of parents were the farthest removed from the position supported in the literature. It should be noted here, that parent responses, in varying from the literature, do not necessarily imply negative attitudes toward gifted students and/or gifted programs. Rather, analysis of responses to individual items supports the interpretation that parents, as a group, were simply less informed and less critical of existing public school programs than were teacher and administrator groups.

A second distinguishable pattern is one of recurring differences of opinion between groups of persons from different educational levels. On 4 of the 7 clusters (Identification, Educational Needs, Teacher Characteristics and Current Provisions) these differences of opinion were statistically significant. In each of these instances, the differences were between persons with a college degree and persons with a high school diploma or less. Those persons in the college degree group tended consistently to respond in greater agreement with expert opinion than did their non-college counterparts. As would be expected, all of the members of the non-college degree group were parents. In fact, 81 percent of the total parent population is included in the non-degreed group. Thus, in this sample, differences occurring between degree holders and

non-degree holders are essentially differences between educators and parents.

A third pattern of differences which emerges from analysis of responses is that between persons of different income groups. Analysis of variance tests indicated that in 3 of the 7 clusters (Identification, Teacher Characteristics, Current Provisions) these differences were statistically significant. Where significant differences of opinion occurred between income groups, the disagreement always centered around group 2 (those persons reporting an annual income between $4,000 and $8,000). This group of respondents differed with every other income group, including those who reported annual incomes below $4,000. Since the composition of this group is all parent, the researcher notes that, once again, educators are at variance with a clearly defined segment of the parent community. Again, it must be noted that responses of this group, though varying widely from leaders in the field of gifted education, do not imply negative attitudes toward gifted students and/or gifted programs. Rather, examination of individual items reveals a conservative view of public education, with a high degree of confidence in and satisfaction with current educational practices.

A fourth pattern of differences which may be observed in the responses to this questionnaire is that between groups of persons who did, or did not report having a gifted close friend. Analysis of variance tests found this factor statistically significant in 4 of the 7 clusters. In responses to statements about characteristics of gifted students and methods for identification of gifted students, the group which reported having had a gifted close friend was in closer agreement with literature in the field than the group of persons who did not report having had a gifted close friend. In response to statements about funding priority for gifted programs and adequacy of current

educational provisions for gifted students, the group which reported gifted close friends expressed less satisfaction with current provisions and a desire to see gifted programs and students receive a higher priority in the allocation of educational dollars.

Other group differences which were observed include differences (on 2 clusters) between age groups and, in one instance, a significant difference between ethnic groups. Members of different age groups disagreed significantly on issues involving identification of gifted students and current educational provisions for gifted students. Examination of the data did not, however, yield sufficient information to support conclusions about patterns or trends within these differences. Anglo and Hispanic group members differed on statements concerning the identification of gifted students. While one might speculate that this difference could be related to the controversy reported in the literature on the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of traditional identification methods for the culturally different child, the present data is insufficient to fully support such a conclusion.

In addition to the patterns of discord already mentioned, the data revealed certain patterns of agreement between and within groups. One positive pattern is seen in Cluster II (Characteristics) which measures the extent to which respondents' perceptions of gifted children agree with the characteristics cited in gifted literature. The only significant difference of opinions on this cluster was between groups of persons who did or did not report having a gifted friend, with those who did have gifted friends responding in closer agreement with expert opinion than those who did not report a gifted friend. Beyond this, there were no significant disagreements on the characteristics of gifted children.

Responses to individual items by all groups attributed positive characteristics to the gifted student. In contrast to the negative stereotyping of

gifted children which is often noted in the literature, respondents within this school district appear to share an overall favorable impression of what the gifted student is likely to be.

Another pattern of agreement may be seen in the area of funding for gifted programs where, in all groups, respondents were sympathetic. While respondents were generally unwilling to specify that gifted programs should receive highest funding priority, responses to individual items indicated a consensus that gifted programs should receive dollar support equal to that given to underachievers and slow learners. Furthermore, respondents in all groups agreed that money invested in educational programs for gifted students would yield a high return in the form of invention and innovation, and that benefits to be derived from such funding would profit society at large. The only significant difference of opinion relative to funding priority for gifted programs was a difference in degree of support, with persons who reported having a gifted close friend responding to statements in this cluster with a stronger affirmative than those who reported no gifted friend.

One final pattern of agreement may be observed in the responses of this sample population--that is a total lack of significant difference of opinion attributable to whether or not the respondent reports having a gifted relative. A relatively large percentage of respondents did, in fact, report having a gifted family member. This fact, however, apparently had no influence on opinions surveyed in this study.

TABLE 66

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT INTERACTION EFFECTS IN

ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TESTS

	Cluster 1 (Definition)	Cluster 2 (Characteristics)	Cluster 3 (Identification)	Cluster 4 (Needs)	Cluster 5 (Funding Priority)	Cluster 6 (Teacher Characteristics)	Cluster 7 (Current Provisions)
GROUP	*		*	*		*	*
AGE			*				*
EDUCATION			*	*		*	*
ETHNICITY			*				
INCOME			*			*	*
GIFTED FRIEND		*	*		*		*
GIFTED RELATIVE							

TABLE 67

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT INTERACTION EFFECTS IN

TWO-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TESTS

CLUSTER	1 DEFINITION	2 CHARACTERISTICS	3 IDENTIFICATION	4 EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	5 FUNDING PRIORITY	6 TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS	7 CURRENT PROVISIONS
GROUP X AGE							
GROUP X EDUCATION							
GROUP X INCOME			*			*	
GROUP X ETHNICITY						*	
GROUP X GIFTED FRIEND							
GROUP X GIFTED RELATIVE							

*Denotes differences significant at a .05 confidence level